



NEWS RELEASE

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Transportation Fixes Recommended to Governor

The Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation today adopted recommendations that identify a bold mix of solutions for addressing the state's transportation crisis.

"This is a new way of doing business," said commission Chairman Doug Beighle. "We adopted a broad and balanced package of new and innovative strategies to increase efficiencies, reduce congestion bottlenecks, take care of our roads, bridges and transit services, and give regions of our state the ability to fix their own traffic problems. This package is the map that can be used to direct the state's transportation system in the future."

Gov. Gary Locke accepted the commission's recommendations at a news conference today concluding the commission's two-day meeting in Seattle. "The public demands accountability, efficiency and results," Locke said. "This package paves the way to taking bold steps in response to these demands."

The recommendations center around six critical elements:

- Establishing benchmarks and performance standards then measuring progress;
- Increasing accountability and implementing aggressive efficiencies;
- Investing in the basics to keep the statewide transportation system functioning well;
- Empowering regions to fix their own problems by managing and funding improvements;
- Ensuring funding will address needs; and
- Adopting an early action legislative package.

To succeed in both solving transportation problems and restoring public confidence, the recommendations call for establishing clear benchmarks and performance standards and tying future funding for transportation agencies to their performance measured against these goals and benchmarks. Recommended benchmarks include: ensuring that zero percent of highways and local arterials are in poor condition; measuring driver delay against the national average; controlling administrative costs; measuring public transit agencies' operating costs; and meeting air quality requirements.

"The opportunities the commission has identified for increasing efficiency will greatly offset the amount of new revenues that are needed to keep the state moving as our challenges continue mounting in pace with our growing population and economic needs," said Beighle.

Recommendations for increased accountability and more aggressive efficiencies include: putting the governor in charge of the state DOT; capping administrative costs; eliminating legislative and regulatory barriers that keep agencies from sharing resources; and streamlining the permitting process so projects can be built faster.

Since everyone benefits from the transportation network that moves people, goods and freight, the commission recommends investing in our statewide transportation system to keep it functioning well. Cities, counties and the state must commit to doing the basics first: ensuring that roads and highways are well maintained and safe; sustaining transit services, including ferries; strengthening bridges to withstand earthquakes; and making appropriate improvements to keep pace with growth.

While there are common basic transportation needs throughout the state, unique challenges arise in different parts of Washington. The commission recommends that regions be empowered to solve their own transportation problems by granting them new authority, flexibility and funding sources. Regions would be given a revenue “tool kit” including the ability to increase annual license fees, create charges on the annual mileage of vehicles, and increase local sales taxes. Also called for is the establishment of a regional equity principle to ensure basic operations, maintenance and preservation are covered statewide and to guarantee a minimum return of 85 percent of new revenues that are generated in each region, with the remainder supporting a statewide equalization fund.

A centerpiece of the commission’s recommendations is an “early action” legislative strategy that identifies specific steps to take in the next six years to fight gridlock and rebuild public confidence that transportation problems are being addressed. The commission’s early action strategy raises \$8-12 billion in new state and regional funds that will focus on addressing key maintenance projects, fixing the worst congestion chokepoints in the state, completing many road and highway construction projects that are ready to proceed, synchronizing traffic signals, building 15,000 new park-and-ride stalls, restoring ferry services, and adopting immediate incentives to help all transportation agencies achieve benchmark standards.

The commission identified an estimated \$150 billion in transportation needs over the next 20 years, of which only \$55 billion is currently funded, leaving a shortfall of \$95 billion. The commission recommends raising \$8-12 billion over the next six years and an additional \$30-40 billion by 2020. The state could resolve the remaining \$40-50 billion in costs by implementing aggressive efficiency measures and new approaches to reducing traffic, including telecommuting, smart growth land use development and transportation demand management.

To raise the necessary funds, the commission proposes a mix of taxes and fees phased in over a number of years. This phasing would allow transportation agencies time to implement the necessary efficiencies and prepare for expanded services and construction projects. The commission based its revenue recommendations on two principles: those who use the transportation system should fund it, and there must be a fair balance of funding among roads, transit and other transportation choices.

The initial six-year revenue package includes efficiency savings and a combination of placing a sales tax on the commodity price of gasoline, a surcharge on transportation goods, an approximate six-cent increase in the gas tax, expanding weight-based fees to all vehicles, and an aggressive bonding program. Beyond 2007, revenue will be contingent on progress being made toward benchmark targets.

The commission is preparing a final report that will be delivered to the governor and legislature by the end of December. This will complete the commission's work. The governor and legislature are expected to consider the commission's recommendations during the 2001 legislative session.

The commission's recommendations will be posted on the Internet at www.brct.wa.gov.

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